



Kate Edmundson  
Interim Executive Director

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

**COMMISSIONERS:**  
CAROL O. BIONDI  
PATRICIA CURRY  
HON. JOYCE FAHEY  
ANN E. FRANZEN  
SUSAN F. FRIEDMAN  
HELEN A. KLEINBERG, CHAIR  
DAISY MA  
DR. LA-DORIS MCCLANEY  
REV. CECIL L. MURRAY  
WENDY L. RAMALLO, ESQ.  
SANDRA RUDNICK, VICE CHAIR  
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, VICE CHAIR  
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS

## UNAPPROVED MINUTES

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The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **November 6, 2006**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

### COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi  
Patricia Curry  
Hon. Joyce Fahey  
Ann E. Franzen  
Susan F. Friedman  
Helen A. Kleinberg  
Dr. La-Doris McClaney  
Wendy L. Ramallo  
Sandra Rudnick  
Adelina Sorkin  
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

### COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Daisy Ma  
Rev. Cecil L. Murray

### YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES

Jason Anderson  
William Johnson

### APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda for the November 6, 2006, meeting was unanimously approved.

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- The minutes of the October 2, 2006, general meeting were unanimously approved.

- The minutes of the October 16, 2006, general meeting were unanimously approved.

### **ELECTION OF COMMISSION OFFICERS**

Commissioner Fahey distributed ballots for this year's slate of officers:

<b>Chair:</b>	<b>Helen Kleinberg</b>
<b>Vice Chair:</b>	<b>Sandra Rudnick</b>
<b>Vice Chair:</b>	<b>Nina Sorkin</b>

Written ballots were distributed to all Commissioners present, and **all voted to approve the above slate**. (Those absent for the vote were Commissioners Friedman, Ma, Murray, and Ramallo.) Commissioner Fahey congratulated the newly elected officers and noted that the ballots would be on file in the Commission office. Chair Kleinberg thanked Commissioner Fahey for her work on the election process.

### **CHAIR'S REPORT**

- Chair Kleinberg introduced Marge Kelly, who is returning from retirement to assist in the Probation Department for a few months.
- Chair Kleinberg welcomed Austin Patteson to the Commission office staff; he is helping out interim executive director Kate Edmundson two days a week.
- Commissioners were asked to give staff member Elizabeth Hinton the certificates of completion from their mandatory ethics training sessions.
- A gang violence conference is being held November 17 from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Los Angeles Convention Center. Information was included in Commissioner packets, and those interested in attending should contact the office.
- Ms. Hinton encouraged Commissioners to inform her if they are not able to attend Commission meetings; if the office does not hear from an absent Commissioner, the absence is considered 'unexcused' in the quarterly reports made to the Board office appointing the Commissioner. The Executive Office also compiles the percentage of member attendance for the Commission's sunset review report.
- Because of a change in the Hall of Administration's mail pick-up schedule, materials to be distributed to Commissioners must be in the office no later than 2:00 p.m. on the Wednesday prior to a Commission meeting. (Mail pick-up is now at 3:00 p.m.)
- Chair Kleinberg thanked Commissioner Murray and Ms. Edmundson, who have spent two and a half days interviewing approximately half of the 18 to 20 candidates for the position of executive director. Other Commissioners will be involved in final interviews, probably within a couple of weeks. Chair Kleinberg also expressed appreciation to the Executive Office for its help during this process.
- Susan Jakubowski is serving as the liaison between the Department of Children and Family Services and the Commission, and Chair Kleinberg thanked her for her help.

- On November 8, the Commission has been invited to present to the Probation Commission on the Title IV-E waiver.

## **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

- About a week and a half ago, the state notified Los Angeles and Alameda counties as to its offer for funding the Title IV-E waiver: administrative costs that reflect actuals in 2006–2007, and assistance costs that reflect actuals in 2005–2006, with no growth built in. After discussions with Probation, the Chief Administrative Office, and Alameda County, Los Angeles County agreed that this was not an appropriate offer, and entered into negotiations with the state to reach an more equitable figure. Former DCFS director David Sanders, now with Casey Family Programs in Seattle, offered to provide a financial expert to consult in this process—an offer gratefully accepted—and that person will be identified this week. Director Trish Ploehn believes that the parties are close to terms, and said that final agreement will start the clock ticking on the 30 days the county has to get the waiver plan through the Board of Supervisors and up to Sacramento, so the state may forward it to the Federal government. It now seems doubtful that waiver implementation will begin on January 1, and Ms. Ploehn thinks the start date will more likely be around April 1.
- The 200-plus strategies that emerged from the community and stakeholder planning process for the waiver were whittled down to 46. From these, DCFS and Probation each developed six major strategies to implement first, based on what each strategy would cost, what its impact would be, and how fast it could be accomplished. (The quicker the turnaround, the more reduction in caseloads, and thus the more savings available for reinvestment.) The six DCFS strategies are:
  - **Family finding and engagement**, a full process to identify biological parents, extended family, and unrelated people who are important in children's lives
  - An **expansion of team decision-making** to convene conferences about permanency and other critical choices, rather than placements only
  - **Upfront assessments** that will look at major challenges to families (mental health issues, domestic violence, and substance abuse, for example) and do a better job of connecting families to resources, thereby reunifying them more quickly and keeping some families out of the system altogether
  - Developing resources for **community-based placements** so children can be housed in their own communities, thus making reunification easier
  - Establishing a comprehensive **parent/child/sibling visitation** program
  - **Expanding family preservation** services

Several of these strategies match Probation's, and the two departments are working out ways to close the gap and use resources more efficiently. Although family preservation and community-based placements seem close, family preservation services are provided in-home (sometimes before a family appears in court), and community-based placements are resources for temporary out-of-home care. Family preservation

services are normally limited to one year's duration, and Ms. Ploehn will get more information about ways to offer services beyond that timeframe. Chair Kleinberg suggested devoting a whole meeting's agenda to family preservation.

Proper staff training in family finding and engagement—as well as in appropriately identifying mental health, domestic violence, and substance abuse issues—will be critical, and Ms. Ploehn assured Commissioners that the DCFS training division is following waiver implementation plans closely. Changes are already underway in the academy for social workers new to the department and in additional trainings connected to waiver strategies. One of the primary ways family finding is done is through the team decision-making participants developing a 'genogram,' which the TDM facilitator records. Family Finding, a program using a similar process, has enjoyed great success at Hollygrove, and its creator is working with youth permanency initiatives in Sacramento; the Metro North office has applied for one of that organization's grants. The program itself is very structured, using a bank database to search title-related information that can yield a spider web of addresses. Family Finding's goal is to uncover a minimum of 30 contacts for a child before moving ahead, while DCFS usually tries to find 10 contacts and starts working with them right away. A search costs only \$25, but if it yields 15 hits, someone must follow up on each, and every one might require another five phone calls. Ms. Ploehn is exploring the idea of using augmentation funds for the social workers conducting those searches, and Commissioner Fahey suggested asking CASA (Court-Appointed Special Advocates) volunteers to help. Ms. Ploehn said that the Permanency Partners Program (P3) staff and CASA managers have met, and CASA volunteers have been trained by Family Finding and are working with that organization.

#### **REPORT ON COMMISSION RETREAT**

Commissioner McClaney summarized the retreat, which she thought was an outstanding opportunity for Commissioners to learn about their roles and responsibilities. Retreat attendees agreed that documentation for meeting presentations should be provided to Commissioners as early as possible, but that regular meetings should not be just occasions to hear reports. The Commission needs to be more of a working body, staying focused on results and focused on children.

#### **PROBATION CAMP REDESIGN**

David Mitchell from the Probation Department presented an overview of the proposed redesign of the probation camps, a document that was recently submitted to the Chief Administrative Office. The final implementation plan will be far more detailed, and will outline the four major goals for the department put forward by former chief Paul Higa:

- Physical and emotional safety for children and youth in the probation system
- A seamless continuum of best practices
- Aftercare and community involvement
- Data-driven outcomes

Major tenets of the redesign include moving from a custodial to a therapeutic system, using a full multidisciplinary assessment team—including Probation, the Department of Mental Health, Juvenile Court Health Services, and the Los Angeles County Office of Education—to identify risk factors and assign youth to the camp with the most appropriate programs for their needs. Low-risk children will be better served by wraparound and supportive services at school and within their community, and camps should be populated only by medium- and high-risk youth who are there to be stabilized until they can move into the community and continue receiving services. Juvenile court judge Michael Nash supports the return of determinant sentencing to the Probation Department, provided that the appropriate services and assessments are available. (If youth receive an ‘Access 1’ diagnosis, for example, they may be Department of Mental Health clients for the rest of their lives. Although the Mental Health Services Act has allocated \$1.5 million to augment mental health services within the probation camps, a level 12 or 14 placement is probably more appropriate for these high-end youth, who are being diverted to those placements following a full DMH assessment.)

The seamless continuum of services must start in the field, with services—now admittedly fragmented—building on the Los Angeles Risk and Resiliency Check-up (LARRC) assessment tool. If a better job of assessment is done, Mr. Mitchell said, inappropriate recommendations for camp placements won’t be made, and youth can be served in less restrictive settings. Aftercare and community involvement are critical, as is engaging parents in their children’s treatment. Transition planning should begin 60 days prior to a youth’s release, and both probation officers and parents need to be part of that plan. Systems navigators now work in five camps and also connect with systems navigators funded by the Mental Health Services Act for transition-aged youth.

Compiling data on the best outcomes and indicators, as well as the best evidence-based interventions, is a struggle, involving longitudinal studies and collecting information that is difficult to quantify. Many interventions used in the camps work, but aren’t evidence-based. That doesn’t mean they will be discarded, but the department needs to make sure they fit in with the larger picture and connect with the appropriate population.

Especially when youth receive psychotropic medications in camp, they must be linked to providers in the community so that treatment may continue upon their release. Approximately 30 percent of probation youth have an Access 1 diagnosis, and about half of those receive psychotropic medications, which are monitored by both nursing and mental health staff. All youth with diagnosed mental illnesses are assigned to Challenger Memorial Youth Center, but many refuse assessments and medications because they don’t want to live there. Undiagnosed mental illnesses often create problems in other camps.

For both adults and youth, the law mandates a cut-off of Medi-Cal upon incarceration. Legislation is in the works to get youth signed up and covered immediately upon their release, but that is not happening now, although youth may enroll themselves for 30 days of emergency Medi-Cal. According to Commissioner Biondi, clinics that are supposed to serve these youth whether or not they have Medi-Cal are not doing so. Money has been

put aside in the MHSA transition-aged youth budget to create full-service partnerships for youth coming out of camps, but contracts have not yet been finalized. A lot of the Probation Department's ability to keep youth in the community, Mr. Mitchell emphasized, is predicated on other initiatives—the Title IV-E waiver plan, for example—falling into place. “There are lots of variables,” he said. “We’re building the plane as we fly.”

The camp redesign will ultimately add 182 staffing items; funding for its first phase has already been secured, and 80 staff are now being hired and trained for Challenger, Camp Scudder, and the assessment unit. Training will include units on the social learning model, motivational interviewing, and other curriculum; as the phases of the redesign are rolled out, staff in all camps will be trained. Motivational interviewing, for instance—which is often done in connection with depression, diabetes, substance abuse, and other disorders—will be part of a small-group therapeutic process to engage children in their own assessments, possibly in a classroom setting.

Probation wants to increase the length of stay in the camps from the current three-six-nine-month model to a six-nine-twelve-month model that would stabilize youth through mental health and other intervention services, and allow for work with families in the community prior to the youth's being released. The timeline for this change depends on a number of factors, including funding and finding space for new staff. An assessment center is being created at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall, and three modular units will be added to Challenger. Camp Rockey, Camp Scudder, and Challenger will each take 20 additional staff. The health and mental health services now housed at Challenger will be decentralized; nursing and pediatric care will be augmented and mental health services will be available at camps Scudder, Scott, Rockey, and Holton. Young women currently placed at Challenger, in the midst of five camps of young men, don't receive the gender-specific services they need. Because of Challenger's remote location, it's difficult to engage parents, and Probation wants to house youth closer to their own communities.

Although the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act once funded transportation for family visitation, it no longer does, and Commissioner Biondi asked how the Probation Department would solve that problem. Mr. Mitchell said that the 2006–2007 budget provides for three hubs at three juvenile halls to send buses to the camps each week; bus tokens for families to reach the halls themselves are also available. Commissioner Biondi mentioned a recent abrupt reduction of visiting hours at the Sylmar facility (from three hours on Sundays to one hour), noting that lip service about the importance of families and visitation cannot withstand that kind of decision. She went on to list evidence-based practices—family group decision-making, for instance, and performance-based standards—that were initiated in the camps and then stopped. Mr. Mitchell acknowledged that Probation had been dependent on other agencies to enter information, which didn't happen; consultants are now developing outcomes and methods to collect that data.

With regard to the length-of-stay change, most youth who are sentenced to three months are serving that time in the community—will they now get six months? Mr. Mitchell said that interventions will be driven by the numbers of youth in the various categories—low-

risk, medium-risk, and high-risk—and that the LARRC tool is being tested to see if it can provide a snapshot of that breakout. LARRC assesses eight different areas of risk, looking at individual maturation levels and at the youth's family and support system, as well as whether youth are at risk for entering the system, for not achieving in school, for not receiving supportive services at home, etc.

The Board of Supervisors just authorized \$400,000 for substance abuse treatment, and Commissioner Biondi asked if those funds would be spread over all the camps or concentrated at Camp Holton. Mr. Mitchell said that the MHSA 2006–2007 plan allocates \$3 million for similar efforts, and he wants to discuss adding mental health and substance abuse services to all camps. The MHSA transition-aged youth budget allocated \$800,000 for the training of camp staff, which will be particularly helpful if mental health services are to be available at all camp sites. Mental-health awareness will be addressed in the second training phase of the camp redesign, and if that can be augmented with MHSA dollars, so much the better.

Under Mr. Higa's original plan, youth who otherwise might have been sent to the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's division of juvenile justice (formerly the California Youth Authority) were being kept in the county for 18 months. With the drop to 12 months, will more youth be sent to the state's jurisdiction? The 18-month program eliminates many 'bed days' in camp, Mr. Mitchell said, and Probation struggles with balancing the best programs for youth versus public safety. Talks between the state and county have raised the possibility of re-opening Barley Flats (a camp closed about 10 years ago) as a young adult facility with 60 or 70 beds. With the planned six-nine-twelve-month length of stay, a backup into the halls is likely within six months without some serious changes in the way the juvenile justice system does business.

Commissioner Ramallo expressed her continuing dismay that the full array of staff in the field, the camps, and the juvenile halls have never been trained in basic child development. This is the core of what the department faces in its proposal for change: forcing evidence-based programs down the throats of untrained probation officers—an effort that will be useless if those staff members look at the youth they are interacting with and see only a chronic offender. Commissioner Ramallo knows of one deputy probation officer, who had never worked with children before, who recommended CYA as a means of punishing one youth for being off his medication and acting out. The education level and training of current probation staff is so defective, she maintained, that hiring new staff is more than the department can handle—it's being set up for failure. Will the allocated money cover uniform training, or even a written manual for officers assigned to juveniles? She recommended adding columns to the sheet listing promising evidence-based programs, noting their success specifically with youth and detailing the training necessary for staff to run them. She implored the department to give training top priority in its budget allocations. Probation line staff can recommend that youth be sent to CYA; Probation line staff (rather than judges) will decide how long kids spend in camp. They *must* be trained on all relevant issues.

Mr. Mitchell said that Probation is trying to re-establish its training academy, this being the first year that money has been available. The initial year of the camp redesign will provide the foundation for change within the department, giving staff a different way of thinking. Tools will come in time, and intensive training for staff in the camps should be complete in about 18 months. Probation would like to provide specific training for specific interventions, but funding streams for that kind of effort are sparse. Even the state's \$1.8 million allocation will not go far. He acknowledged that changing the department's philosophy will require a lot of front-end training and a particular awareness of mental health issues, but he believes that the LARRC tool provides enough information for appropriate referrals within the three categories of risk—low, medium, and high. Probation officers are not, however, clinical social workers.

Commissioner Williams asked about the historical practice of parents turning over children to the Probation Department when they could not control them. That no longer occurs because of overcrowding in the juvenile halls, Mr. Mitchell said, but school-based programs provide services to families who give permission for their children's involvement with the department, though they are not formally entered into the system. By law, 601 cases—for truancy or incorrigibility, non-detaining offenses—and the more serious 602 cases must be separated. With gang activity so prevalent and the supervision of young people such a challenge for working parents, Commissioner Williams said, it seems as though children often have to break a law before they can get help. Prevention efforts need to involve youth in community-based activities so they don't get to that point. The Probation Department has over 90 officers based in middle schools, an ideal age group to target, and Mr. Mitchell hopes that the prevention initiative and the Title IV-E waiver plan—which could also utilize the Department of Public Social Services family preservation dollars—will funnel more funds into engaging children before they enter the system. (The Rand Corporation ostensibly gathers relevant data, Commissioner Biondi said, an effort paid for by the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act, but its PowerPoint presentation in March 2006 showed only 2004–2005 statistics, and to date, Probation has not yet received a copy of that report.)

In general, Commission Biondi said, county government does not support communities doing prevention-related work. Of the \$30 million allotted by the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act last year to develop the community capacity for these efforts, \$20 million went back to County Departments including Probation and the Sheriff's Department. Community groups need to make their voices heard at the Board of Supervisors level to change this.

It would be great, Commissioner Ramallo said, if more officers engaged families when a child was truant, but that doesn't happen. The money is always there for cops and guns, and for housing offenders in remote locations, but funding needs to go the other way as well. The Probation Department clearly needs money to drive its decisions. Mr. Mitchell agreed whole-heartedly, saying that one of Probation's problems was never having defined what it does, its mission instead being pushed by mandates and funding streams. DCFS was successful in developing its four common goals, but Probation's outlook has



always been that “we can do it all,” which means, unhappily, that none of it gets done very well. The juvenile side of Probation—apart from the 60,000 adults the department also oversees—is a stepchild of juvenile justice and social services, never fully defined and never fully accepted as a body that makes recommendations that determine children’s futures. If prevention is going to be one of its core values, that must be funded.

Commissioner Fahey mentioned that there are at least 100 families per day in a single court. These are the most at-risk kids; not yet in the formal juvenile court system, but readily identifiable and screaming for help. They are perpetual truants, using drugs, involved with violence, known to the police; their parents are ready to hand them over and say good-bye (but still taking the time to accompany them to court)—yet nothing happens to them. They regularly report to judges, but there is no follow-up. In the past they could have been prosecuted as “incorrigibles”, but today the only consequence is taking their driver’s license away. No one links them to the pathetic array of community resources that exist, and not one department provides services to them. This population must be brought to the attention of the Board of Supervisors, she and Commissioner Curry urged, so the Board can direct the prevention group to make them a first priority.

### **CHILD DEATH STATISTICS**

Cassandra Turner reviewed a statistical report on child fatalities known to have prior DCFS involvement from January 2003 through September 2006. Already this year, the first chart shows that 121 children have died through accident or homicide, from natural causes, as a result of suicide, or from undetermined causes. The homicide statistic for 2006—53 deaths—is particularly alarming, since the second chart shows a huge spike in drive-by shootings for this year in comparison to previous years. Law enforcement, DCFS, and Probation need to determine how much an increase in gang activity may be responsible for these deaths, and how a collaborative effort can be made to reduce the factors driving this trend.

A third chart presents homicides from abuse and neglect, broken out by case status, and shows fluctuating numbers with no consistent increase over time. The overall breakout by age shows a marked increase in deaths of children age 10 and older, while the percentage of deaths for children under two years of age—mostly from abuse and neglect—has decreased from 58 percent in 2004 to 32 percent in 2006.

Commissioner Biondi questioned the accuracy of some of this data, saying that the numbers of victims having open cases with DCFS should be higher. Commissioner Curry asked about the 39 deaths in 2005 that resulted from undetermined causes. Ms. Turner said that determinations were made by the coroner’s office, and sometimes those reports are not received for some months. While acknowledging that the spike in drive-by shootings was a huge issue, Commissioner Curry felt that the very high abuse and neglect numbers in 2005 should also be of grave concern.

Commissioner Ramallo suggested studying the individual files to determine where case practice might have contributed to a child’s death. How many shooting deaths had more than just a fleeting prior history with DCFS? Could these children have been known to

the department for years? Were caseworkers not looking at something relating to the safety of the child in that particular home? She also asked for a study of cases where children died by gunshot wound. How did the child get the gun? Did it belong to a parent or foster parent? State law requires that guns be kept in a gun safe, but is that being enforced? Commissioner Curry also asked whether the 39 children killed in drive-by shootings so far this year were living at home or were placed with relatives, in a group home, or a foster home. (If they were primarily placed with relatives, perhaps this is a subject the relative caregiver committee can address; likewise, if they were mostly in group homes, the residentially based services work group might take up the topic.) What do we know about these children, and what questions aren't being asked in the internal review of these deaths? Many years ago, Chair Kleinberg said, Commissioners talked to the victim's relatives, neighbors, and schools, but reviews these days look like people within DCFS talking to each other. Perhaps case practice did contribute to a child's death, but that is difficult to determine. Was the child released from out-of-home placement into a home in the wrong gang territory? Social workers may not know enough about gangs nor get enough training on gang activity to ask the right questions. Mr. Mitchell said that the Probation Department's gang unit would be happy to help out.

Ms. Turner said that the Office of Independent Review and its efforts were separate from the child death unit, as are the reviews done by the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN), which is invited to sit in on all DCFS reviews. The perspective of the OIR investigation has broadened, although only one staff person is currently on board, and collaborative contacts are now being considered to answer these questions. The structured decision-making tool used to assess safety and risk factors in the home is based on studies of what caseworkers should be looking at, but it does not include the environment surrounding the home nor the caretaker's ability. Ms. Ploehn said that a new assessment tool does look at the caregiver, and she will alert the structured decision-making staff to consider expanding the tool to include these factors. Commissioner Ramallo suspects that most of these cases involve the gang activities of siblings or others close to the family, and she stressed that a comprehensive picture of everyone living in the home be made part of the existing assessment tool.

Chair Kleinberg asked for the locations of the drive-by shootings, and Ms. Turner said that she could identify them only by service planning area; she will contact the various law enforcement agencies involved to get a more detailed listing. In response to Ms. Turner's request for a liaison from the Commission, Ms. Edmundson agreed to make sure that all pending questions are answered, and to determine as much as possible whether these deaths are really random in nature or not. (Vice Chair Sorkin also asked about asthma as a contributing factor to deaths from natural/medical causes.)

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

#### **MEETING ADJOURNED**